



July 15, 2009

## Beshear, Daniels tout bridges progress

*By Marcus Green  
magreen@courier-journal.com*

With Indiana Gov. Mitch Daniels, Louisville Mayor Jerry Abramson, local and state legislators and business leaders looking on, Kentucky Gov. Steve Beshear ceremoniously signed a bill Wednesday that would help create a funding mechanism for the Ohio River Bridges Project.

The action comes as Louisville's Metro Council prepares to take up a resolution that would move the embattled \$4.1 billion project forward.

The Kentucky General Assembly in June approved House Bill 3, which aims to establish a bi-state authority that would make key funding decisions, including whether to levy tolls, for the plan to build two bridges between Louisville and Southern Indiana, and redesign the Spaghetti Junction interchange.

"The Ohio River Bridges Project can and will become a reality," Beshear, a Democrat, told a supportive crowd at a ceremonial bill signing at the Kentucky Center.

Indiana's legislature has agreed to create an Ohio River Bridges Commission to work with Kentucky on a plan to pay for and build the bridges.

Daniels announced Wednesday that he had appointed New Albany, Ind., businessman Kerry Stemler as the commission's citizen member. Stemler is a trucking company executive and a longtime proponent of the project.

Daniels, a Republican, said every day that passes without new bridges is "a lost opportunity," and he urged officials to do their work rapidly.

"Let's not be impulsive, but let's be quick," he said.

The ceremony came nearly seven years after then-Kentucky Gov. Paul Patton and the late Indiana Gov. Frank O'Bannon met in Clarksville, Ind., and pledged their intent to build the bridges at a cost of \$1.4 billion. At the time, the governors said they wanted construction to happen quickly.

A year later, the federal government approved the project.

But, since then, work has nearly ground to a halt amid financing difficulties in Kentucky, worsened by a rising price tag. (Indiana has \$600 million set aside in proceeds from leasing a Northern Indiana toll road.)

At Wednesday's announcement, officials talked of a new momentum, but Kentucky Transportation Secretary Joe Prather said it would be premature to discuss a possible construction timeline.

Kentucky's bill gives a limited role to the Metro Council, where two resolutions are scheduled to get their first readings Thursday. Under the state legislation, the council may ask Abramson and Beshear to advance the project by naming representatives to negotiate with Indiana officials.

That group would then hammer out details of the bi-state authority.

One resolution, whose 17 co-sponsors include council President David Tandy, D-4th District and Republican caucus leader Kevin Kramer, R-11th, asks Abramson and Beshear to make the appointments. It also requests that a Metro Council member be one of the mayor's four appointees to the bi-state authority.

Tandy said he's encouraged with the resolution's support, which includes nine Republican and eight Democrat sponsors.

"I'm hopeful that we'll get more," Tandy said. "There were a number of members who wanted to read more about our resolution before signing on."

"I'm pretty confident that we've got the votes on board right now," Kramer said. "It's a matter now of making sure that we answer any questions that people have. This is the time to ask legitimate questions. We certainly shouldn't be running from them."

A separate resolution backed by Tina Ward-Pugh, D-9th, and Tom Owen, D-8th, seeks to have public hearings in each council district before the council acts on the bridges project.

Reporter Marcus Green can be reached at (502) 582-4675.

With Indiana Gov. Mitch Daniels, Louisville Mayor Jerry Abramson, local and state legislators and business leaders looking on, Kentucky Gov. Steve Beshear ceremoniously signed a bill Wednesday that would create a funding mechanism for the Ohio River Bridges Project.

The action comes as the Louisville Metro Council prepares to take up a resolution that would move the embattled \$4.1 billion project forward.

The Kentucky General Assembly in June approved House Bill 3, which ultimately aims to establish a bi-state authority between Kentucky and Indiana to make key funding decisions for the plan to build two bridges and redesign the Spaghetti Junction interchange.

"The Ohio River Bridges Project can and will become a reality," Beshear, a Democrat, told a supportive crowd at a Kentucky Center bill signing.

Indiana's legislature has agreed to create an Ohio River Bridges Commission to work with Kentucky on a plan to pay for and build the bridges.

Daniels, a Republican, said every day that passes without new bridges is "a lost opportunity," and he urged officials to do their work rapidly.

"Let's not be impulsive, but let's be quick," Daniels said.

Kentucky's bill also gives a limited role to the Metro Council, where two resolutions are scheduled to get their first readings Thursday night. Under the state legislation, the council may ask Abramson and Beshear to advance the project by naming representatives to negotiate with Indiana officials.

That group would then hammer out details of the bi-state authority.

One resolution, whose 16 co-sponsors include council President David Tandy, D-4th District and Republican caucus leader Kevin Kramer, R-11th, asks Abramson and Beshear to make the appointments. It also requests that a Metro Council member be one of the mayor's four appointees to the bi-state authority.

Tandy said he's encouraged with the resolution's support.

"I'm hopeful that we'll get more" co-sponsors, Tandy said. "There were a number of members who wanted to read more about our resolution before signing on."

"I'm pretty confident that we've got the votes on board right now," Kramer said. "It's a matter now of making sure that we answer any questions that people have. This is the time to ask legitimate questions. We certainly shouldn't be running from them."

A separate resolution filed by Tina Ward-Pugh, D-9th, and Tom Owen, D-8th, seeks to have public hearings in each council district before the council acts on the bridges project.

## Additional Facts

The council meets at 6 p.m. Thursday in the council chambers on third floor of City Hall at Sixth and Jefferson streets.

Speakers must register with the council clerk by 4 p.m. the day before a meeting. To register, call 574-3902. Up to 10 people may speak for three minutes each on nearly any subject at beginning of the meeting.

Find more information at [www.louisvilleky.gov/](http://www.louisvilleky.gov/), or track your council member's votes at [courier-journal.com/councilvotes](http://courier-journal.com/councilvotes)

---